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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MASERU'S PRE-ELECTIONS MEDIA WORKSHOP IS TIMELY,
ENGAGING

REF: 2006 MASERU 516

¶1. SUMMARY: On February 8-9, 2007, Embassy Maseru gathered 25 of Lesotho's state-employed and independent journalists for a two-day pre-election media workshop conducted by Cape Town-based American media trainer Terry FitzPatrick. Mr. FitzPatrick used examples from television, radio, and print media from election campaigns around the world to teach local journalists how to be a powerful advocate for the people in the period leading up to elections. With the entire Basotho nation focused on Lesotho's upcoming National Assembly elections, the workshop was timely, well-attended, and generated ideas which were immediately put into practice at the end of the training. END SUMMARY.

Enthusiastic Group, Important Times

¶2. On February 8-9, 2007, Embassy Maseru organized a pre-election media trading workshop in Maseru. The group participated in lectures and group exercises aimed at improving journalists' judgment and reasoning skills as they face difficult decisions while covering electoral campaigns. The workshop also included a highly relevant panel discussion with speakers from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and Lesotho's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) concerning the role and responsibilities of the media during elections.

¶3. Twenty-five reporters from thirteen media houses were present for the two-day session. The participants, from both Lesotho's state-owned media and many of the country's private media outlets, stated on their evaluation forms that they were impressed by the dynamism of the presenter and the concept that they could be a strong force in shaping the space for dialog on social issues during this important time.

Topics on Lesotho's Collective Mind

¶4. Topics of the workshop included: 1) organizing political debates; 2) covering candidates and parties; and 3) how to act as an electoral system watchdog. Many participants stated that these topics had been on their minds recently, and that this presentation aided them to put these issues in their proper global, regional, and local contexts. Manifold challenges face Lesotho's journalists as Lesotho's election veered into negative campaigning and complex issues needed to be explained to the public, such as the meaning of shifting party alliances within the "Mixed Member Proportional" parliamentary system.

¶5. During one group exercise, journalists brainstormed about questions to ask candidates during their next encounters. In the week after the session, several journalists put these

questions to real world use. At the end of the workshop, the media personnel expressed their appreciation and willingness to attend such further training organized by the U.S. Embassy.

Why Did This Event Succeed?

16. COMMENT: This pre-election media training workshop was a success for several reasons: 1) Terry FitzPatrick, an experienced media trainer with extensive experience in Africa, put together a very relevant and engaging program; 2) through negotiating with a Nordic aid organization which had arranged a concurrent media-related workshop, we managed to borrow their participants for the two days of our (superior) workshop, ensuring good attendance; 3) due to the impending elections, the participants were especially engaged and interested in the subject matter; and 4) the hands-on advice and guidance provided by NDI and the IEC gave the workshop an additional practical edge for the participants to take back to their work. With the success of Embassy Maseru's two recent media workshops under our belts in the last six months (reftel), we hope to engage members of the local media who still require professional training. END COMMENT.

PERRY